The Shooting Times and Country Magazine—August 17, 1956

ON HOW TO SEX A BIRD

by Dr. James M. Harrison

The SHOOTING TIMES

and Country Magazine

SEVENTY-FOURTH YEAR FRIDAY, AUGUST 17th, 1956 1s. 3d. WEEKLY

CROSSING THE SHALLOWS

Death by Poisoning

Almost any farm chemical can poison a bird if it gets a sufficient quantity at one meal, *but if used carefully and at the recommended dose* few of the agricultural dressings will cause any harm. There are, however, some exceptions which have proved extremely poisonous to game and other forms of wildlife. These include some of the organo-phosphorus insecticides—particularly those containing schradan—used for aphis control on brassica crops, and the "nitro-type" of weedkiller such as DNC.

A poisonous spray should never be used if a harmless one will do the job as effectively—the hormone weedkillers are harmless. If it is imperative to use a dangerous chemical, it should be restricted to the part of the crop where it is needed; it should also be kept away from any water supply used by wild birds. DNC spraying should be completed by the middle of May or earlier, before partridges hatch and before there are many pheasant chicks in the corn. The organo-phosphorous sprays should be used before the harvest, if possible, so that birds will have alternative safe cover in standing corn. It is also advantageous to drive birds out of a crop before spraying, and keep them out for 24 hours, if possible. Tins containing poison, concentrated puddles of spray, or heaps of dressed seed-corn should obviously not be left about.

The indirect effect of large-scale usage of weedkillers and insecticides on farm land, and the extent to which they will reduce available food supplies for game, are other problems which need a lot more investigation. We are, however, consoled by knowing many intensively farmed estates that hold excellent stocks of game. On these estates, the game crop is planned as part of the farm crop and all possible precautions are taken when spraying. Staying the hand of the Borgias can mean an extra two or three days' shooting.

Issued in the interests of better game conservation by the makers of ELEY-KYNOCH cartridges

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Blunt the Spears

EVER since the sport became popular —and its present popularity may be gauged from the fact that in this country alone over 10,000 spearguns have been sold, the spear of the underwater fish hunter has been a thorn in the flesh of sea anglers. As we have pointed out before in this journal and in *The Anglers' News*, the comparatively cold waters off our coastline form an effective barrier against wholesale fish-spearing and for this we should be profoundly thankful, for the danger of fish extermination by underwater hunters in warmer climes is very real.

Some interesting, and frightening, proof of this was given recently by Mr. Norman Lewis in *Oryx*.

From a difficult sport, calling for practice and skill, spear-fishing, due to modern, compressed air and gas operated guns and lethal spears, sometimes fitted with explosive heads, has become extremely easy and fair proficiency is readily attained. No fish, however large, is proof against this type of equipment and even sharks are shot and then exhausted by spears attached to buoys.

Not all spear fishermen are sportsmen, and poachers have been quick to realise the potentialities of the method. Off the coast of Florida, a single night's work accounted for no less than a thousand pounds of fish.

Mr. Lewis points out that far from being terrified and quick to escape when hunted in their natural surroundings, fish are unfortunately tame and curious, with the result that they remain within close range and at the mercy of the quick loading spear gunner.

The tragedy is that many of the shallow-water fish seem to be irreplaceable. If in fact they are not, their replacement takes a long time. In ten years waters off the South of France, which once teemed with large fish life, have been completely denuded. It is a similar story in Spanish waters, and elsewhere even those species which by their habits and habitat are safe from professional fishermen, are no longer out of reach of the spearman. Anyone who still doubts the extent of the damage possible may like to consider the feat of a Balearic Island's spear-fishing champion, who, since he was fourteen years old, is claimed almost to have exterminated the large fish in his island's waters within ten years. How many "pricked" fish, we wonder, escape to die later, after these underwater hunting orgies.

It has at last been realised, in some cases probably too late, as usual, that control and protection are most necessary if some species of fish are to survive, and the banning of aqualungs for underwater hunting is general in most countries. Nevertheless, this does nothing to prevent countless fish being killed or wonded by holidaymakers.

We can fully appreciate the appeal of spear-fishing. There is no doubt that as a sport it is rewarding ,exciting and sometimes dangerous. We should not like to see it made illegal. But as we have seen and said so often, no sport can survive unless it is sensibly controlled and conducted and the quarry conserved.

It might be possible to impose bag limits, strict seasons, or prohibit the spearing of certain species. Sanctuaries might be established in certain coastal areas. Obviously something must be done, and with no more waste of time unless all waters within easy reach of the spear gunner are to be emptied of their fish life.

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The wild life of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after.—King George VI.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Too Late to Appeal

On the way to the pigeon hides on Bank Holiday Saturday we passed a car-load of holiday-makers obviously looking for a lunch-time outspan and my farmer host's remark was typical of the countryman's attitude to invaders from the towns.

"That's right," he said, "have a lovely picnic, and throw all the tins in the corn."

The campaign to make the public litter-conscious is a ceaseless one and timely reminders are constantly being circulated. It was a pity however, that Mr. Duncan Sandys' personal appeal on the eve of August Bank Holiday was denied wide publicity by being sent out too late to many who could have helped.

I opened the envelope containing a hand-out on the subject, issued by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and dated August 3, on the Tuesday following the holiday. In accordance with its contents I placed it in a handy litter bin, for, of course, it had arrived much too late.

Perhaps the Civil Service has not yet got used to the five-day week.

Pheasants and G.B.S.

At a sale at Sotheby's earlier this month £92 was paid for the four volumes of William Beebe's "A Monograph of the Pheasants," published between 1918 and 1922. At the same sale 15 volumes of books by and about George Bernard Shaw, all first editions, fetched £2.

Insecticides

I believe that a Royal Commission is at present studying the effects of the use of the many insecticides (and similar toxic mixtures used by farmers) on the fauna and flora of the country.

Its findings are due at any moment and those responsible for maintaining fish stocks, as well as game preservers, await them with interest It is possible that such poisons, draining into waterways, may directly affect fish life, but their principal danger would appear at the moment to be the destruction of many of the arthropods on which fish feed.

A company that sells baits has recently been unable to meet the demand for worms, and in an explanatory letter to the Editor of *The Fishing Gazette*, the Director wrote: "We harvest our beds in rotation, and have only just discovered that some of them have been completely finished by an application of farmyard manure which, unknown to us, had been heavily treated with an insecticide disinfectant."

Leaving aside any angling considerations, it seems a demented agricultural policy which uses an insecticide that kills earthworms—for without worms there would be no agriculture.

Spray Damage

Any doubts that some chemical sprays used in agriculture are injurious to wildlife were dispelled by Major General A. G. O'Carroll Scott's recent report to Bedfordshire County Council.

He said that in one field, after the spraying of brussels sprouts, there were picked up dead, six pheasants, 22 partridges, small birds, mice, weasels, crows, hares and leverets.

Mistaken Identity

Early this year the Fauna Preservation Society was asked to make enquiries about the shooting of a wild cat by a trapper of the Forestry Commission, at Ardray, Lochaweside. It was reported that the cat was 45 inches long.

The Forestry Commission explained to the Society that they regretted the incident as it is their policy to preserve wild cats. It seems that the animal was shot in mistake for a fox amongst thick undergrowth.

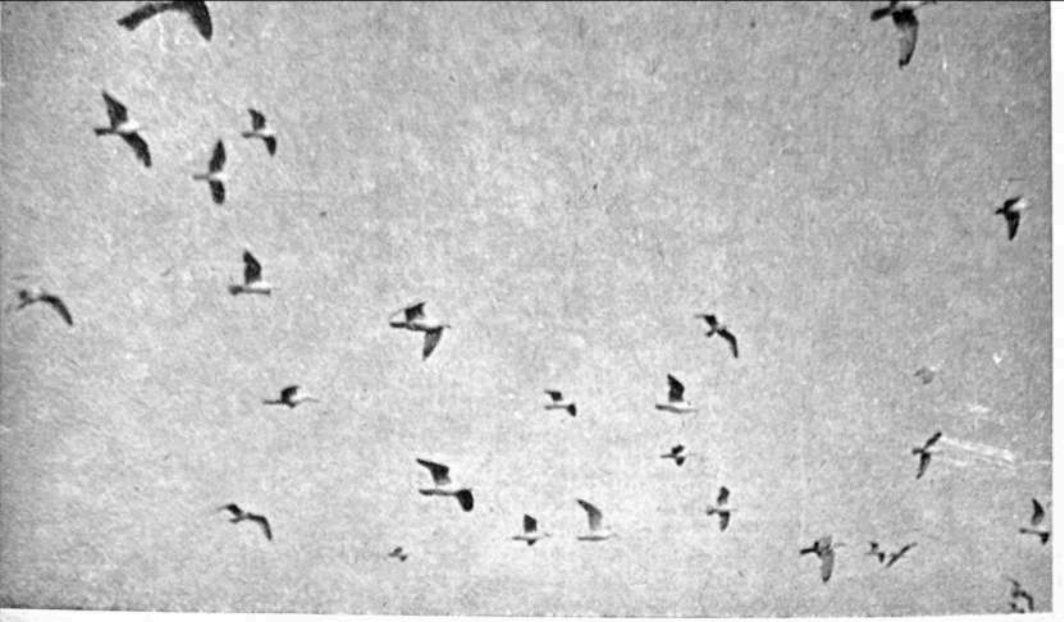
Had the scene been set in hunting country I suppose the incident would not have occurred. Nor, presumably, the wild cat.

Bringing Them Up

A good many fathers will this month be enjoying themselves teaching their sons how to shoot and fish. Initial instruction is necessary and hints given subsequently may be valuable, but it is woefully easy for a grown man to take all the fun out of a boy's sport by a too constant stream of dos and don'ts. In those circumstances angling or shooting becomes a lesson instead of a sport, and any boy of independent character prefers to make his own mistakes—which is all to the good if he learns by them.

This all sounds nearly as bad as the heavy father himself, but I was led to write this comment by an article in *Florida Wildlife*, whose author put the matter much more racily. "I'm talking," he said, "about the bossy know-it-alls, the show-you-every-minute guys, the this-is-the-way-to-do-it fellows whom all of us detest—*except when we're fishing with boys.*" And again, "We become the worst of all possible sportsmen: Instructive bores. Camp dictators. Boat bosses. Ugh!"

AUCEPS.



Gulls flying towards their nightly roost at sea.

Those Perfect Scenes

by Tower-Bird

"COULD there be a more perfect scene?" I wonder how many times in the course of a year one asks oneself, or a companion, this question. Less than an hour ago I was sitting, waiting for pigeon, on a high point of the Sussex hills overlooking the great sweep of cattle-marshes and uplands stretching away to the foot of the South Downs. Directly below me the ground fell away steeply to the valley—ground comprising a wide patch-work of well-tended allotments with a mown grass margin three yards wide.

As I sat on the old trunk of a fallen tree, with a section of camouflage netting in front of me, I looked down on this immediate scene of good husbandry. On each patch of ground grew a row of scarlet runners in full flower, and many of the allotment-holders had grown a row apiece of sweet-peas. An even more enterprising member of the community had a fine fence of Dorothy Perkins ramblers, their fine pink shade showing an individual beauty against the many-coloured sweet-peas and the scarlet lines of tall beans.

Beyond the hedge at the foot of the allotments were a number of cottages of various design, some lining the narrow road, others clustered among the trees. All fitted in perfectly with the surroundings, and, on this calm evening, three days before new game or gun licences are taken out, the peacefulness of the countryside was shown almost to perfection. Smoke rose straight up from a few chimneys, and a thin line of smoke from a recently billowing bonfire stretched along a line of elms like a belt of white evening mist.

Patch-Work Spread

Beyond the cottages, snuggling in their background of trees, lay the wide acres of open marsh, dotted with herds of cattle, the individuals of each herd dotting the particular area of pasture which limited their grazing. Most of the marsh was dark green and rich with lush herbage, but here and there, where the grass had been cut for hay, the pattern was of a much lighter shade. On one side of the marshes the wooded hills rose to the skyline, hiding the contour of the far downs; on the other, the upland fields glowed rich brown, or bright golden, or green, according to the plotting of each farm broken up into unplanted land; growing, unripe corn; grass pasture; roots; or corn ready to cut. With the telescope I could see two fields of oats already standing in sheaf, and two fields of nearly-ripe wheat.

It is, of course, quite impossible to describe on paper the colour, the pattern, the atmosphere, and the ever-shifting aspects of such a scene. Every now and again, as I sat on the iron-hard trunk, far away dots against the sky developed quickly into rooks, jackdaws, or pigeon. One of the latter headed straight towards us, then swerved off at the sudden sight of a man with a hoe, offering me a nice crossing shot—a shot which nearly upset the apple-cart in the shape of a bee-hive, the falling bird missing the House of Bees by inches.

A Different Scene

Without letting my eyes or senses wander, I allowed my mind to drift back to the previous day and to quite another scene ("Could there be a more perfect scene?"), when over a great expanse of calm grey estuary, with a red-hot sun almost scorching us, we sat on a lonely sea-wall and watched flotilla after flotilla of duck (mainly shelduck) afloat on a full neap tide. A fortnight before, we had stood on the mud-flats of a neighbouring harbour watching some three hundred adult shelduck flying up and down, and sunning themselves on small splashes of water, or on banks between larger splashes—colourful and lively gatherings, with every so often a ribald chuckle coming from some old drake with a perverted sense of humour.

But here, today, there were very, very few adult duck—certainly no more than a score. Here, instead, were shelduck pairs which had, as is often their habit, taken over the broods of other pairs, and not necessarily broods of the same age. Thus, in one flotilla led by an old bird and followed up behind by the other, we counted over thirty young duck, from mere striplings to a few quite half-grown. There were other lots of from a dozen to two dozen and more young, and these flotillas dotted now all over the wide expanse of grey, unruffled water made a lively show.

But what is that little lot just over there near the floating buoy? The telescope brings into close view a cock and hen tufted, with a brood of five tiny duckling swimming between them. And look over there right under the fringe of the far spartina—two dozen well-grown, or almost full-grown mallard. Washed from cover by the high neap, they are now feeding, or swimming in the shade of the rushes, strung out in a long line. Quite a number of gulls, noteably buoyant as they sail between the flat islands of mud, individuals restlessly rising and settling again every few seconds, add to the limited late July bird life of the estuary. Now, in July, there are almost as many motor-cruisers, yachts, sailing boats, rowing dinghies, and other small craft afloat farther down the estuary than there are duck and gulls put together, though, in not too many weeks' time there will be another story to tell—craft all laid up on the "hard" and in the ship-yards, and the first wigeon seen drifting up with the tide, or flying in from the Main.

Screaming Jets

But today the scene is, again, perfect. The sparkling grey water under a burning sun; the "shellies" and the smaller duck; the shouting, merry boys swimming, diving, and up-ending at the end of the quay, flippers strapped to their feet and eyes and noses seen through the transparent window of "face goggles." As I watch their energetic rendering of the action of diving seals and duck, the thought strikes me that, in an era when mankind is faced with near-total destruction by H-bombs, the future generation is urgently attempting to get back to that element in which its ancestors developed as fish, and from which they emerged first as amphibians, and later as land-livers.

From the far side of the estuary comes the hum of a tractor, quickly to be drowned by the sudden scream of jets dropping down the sky—the only jarring note to the scene. The jets sweep upwards again in pursuit of one another, turning and twisting, diving and shooting skywards. With their swept-back wings, reminding one sometimes of hobbies, sometimes of small waders, they are, I suppose, graceful in a sense. Yet watch the swallows and the martins, the swifts, and even the gulls, and one realises instantly that, the aerobatics of birds, even those of the predators, are on quite a different plane, lacking, as they do, that sense of viciousness and threat which seems inseparable from the enterprise and handiworks of man. For, though he may have conquered the air for pleasure and profit, yet he remains warlike and progressive. The stooping peregrine dives and makes his kill that he may survive. Alas! avarice and greed are often contained in the motive power which sends man hurtling upwards to the sunways above the clouds, or downwards with a scream towards the good earth.

The quiet joy and appreciation which fills the heart of the true countryman as he leans on a gate and studies the view or the crops, or gazes out over the wider sweep of the land, is disturbed with fear, however small that stirring may be, when the quiet of his surroundings are torn by sudden terrifying scream of aircraft.

Thus, on this golden afternoon, when to look down the estuary was to be dazzled at once by the sparkle on the water, and to look upwards where the tide still crept, caused once more the raising of that question "Could there be a more perfect scene?" the reply at times was in the affirmative as a jet raced low across the countryside, followed soon after by its own mad shriek.

But before the sun sank in a blaze of glory behind the woods across the tideway, and the gulls had taken off from inland and mud-flat in straggling lines for their nightly roost; when the tide had gone down to the sea, leaving only small pools and a silver snake of water in the centre of the estuary, and no sight or sound of a plane remained in the upper air, normal life which had gone on for generations returned, and an atmosphere of satisfying contentment fell at last across the land and across the shining acres of mud-flats.

LEAVES FROM MY GAMEBOOK

by Colin McLean

TOWARDS the end of September, 1912, I had been invited by a good friend to Inverness-shire for a week's grouse driving on his moor in the vicinity of Dalwhinnie; it was a good grouse year, and I had already enjoyed many good days in Aberdeenshire, so was delighted at the thought of seeing a country which was new to me, especially as prospects were so good.

A covey of ptarmigan on the high tops.

The weather was perfect and we had splendid sport, averaging well over a hundred brace a day. My host kindly suggested that on one of the off-days I might like to try for ptarmigan on one of the high tops, where he said, there were generally a few coveys to be found, and as I had never shot a ptarmigan, I was only too glad to try my luck.

The first off-day happened to be dull, and when I set off accompanied by one of the underkeepers, the tops were shrouded in mist and low cloud and the weather did not look too promising. Moreover, by the time we got among the rocks and scree near the summit the cloud was pretty dense and it was not possible to see more than twenty yards or so ahead. To me there is something very weird and exciting about a swirling mist, when everything looks strangely magnified, and odd blue hares which we roused looked as large as retrievers.

As the going here was far from easy and in places quite dangerous, we decided to wait for a time and eat our sandwich lunch before going higher up. All at once there came a sudden break in the mist, so we wasted no time in starting off again whilst visibility was good. A little further up we rounded a steep shoulder of the hill and came on a fine covey of ptarmigan sitting with heads up just below us, and as they rose with a hoarse croak and skimmed off downhill, I managed to kill a couple. We had only just time to pick them up before the cloud came down again like a blanket, and though we waited where we were for some time it showed no signs of lifting, so there was nothing for it but to make the best of our way downhill again.

Far Above Loch Cuiach

The keeper seemed to know his way, though we were some distance down the hill before we got clear of the mist, and we then found that we were a long way from the route by which we had come up; far below us lay Loch Cuiach looking grey and leaden amongst the heather, but before long we reached the end of this loch where a small burn, fed by the outflow, joined it to the river Truim, itself a tributary of the famous Spey.

The outfall cascaded down a steep fall into a fair-sized pool some fifteen feet across by twenty feet long, and here, lying alongside a large boulder was a salmon of some seven or eight pounds. The keeper told me that occasionally they got up here in a spate, but that so far as he knew it was a very rare occurence for a fish to get into the loch up the falls. I threw a stone into the pool and this caused the salmon to move up under the fall and take cover under an overhanging shelf of rock, and there we left him and resumed the long tramp home.

The next day was a Sunday, and my host's son and I set off to try and catch the salmon with our bare hands; I had often in my young days been able to "guddle" with my hands quite good trout in the local burns in Aberdeenshire and there seemed no good reason why we should not be able to "guddle" a salmon.

It was a lovely warm day and we set out for the loch armed only with a sandwich lunch and a camera. Our fish was back again beside the big stone, and our first job was to try to lower the level of the pool by removing a lot of stones and shingle from the bed of the burn, thus making a deeper channel for the water to drain off. By doing this we were able to reduce the depth of the water nearly a foot, so that it was now only some three feet deep at the deepest spot.

Guddling In Reverse

We then waded in to the attack; to start with, the salmon was galvanised into intense activity—dashing round the pool at high speed, and once nearly stranding himself on the shingle at the lower edge, but quite soon he took refuge under the shelving rock below the outfall, and when in this position it was possible to wade quietly within handling range.

When "tickling" or "guddling" a trout, the technique is to move the fingers of one hand very gently up the underside of the fish until it can be firmly grasped just below the gills, but with a salmon of this size it is quite impossible to grasp it anywhere except just above the tail, and I had previously seen salmon tailed by a keeper when no gaff was available on the river Don. However, this particular fish very much resented being tickled the wrong way round, and on more than one occasion wriggled free just when I had got what seemed a good hold, and it was only by wrapping my right hand in a wet handkerchief that I was eventually able to lift him from his lair and struggle out of the pool.

The fish was by no means in good condition, and the general dark and reddish colour—so different from the shining silver of a fresh run fish—showed that he had been in fresh water for a long time and we were quite sure that his eating quality would be very poor. Accordingly, after holding him up for a snapshot to be taken by my accomplice—who incidentally took the photo on the same film as that of a group of guns lunching on the moor—we decided to set him free in the loch just above, where he swam off at high speed none the worse for his experience, whilst we plodded home, wet but well satisfied with our Sabbath day's work.

Next evening I was due to go south to Norfolk, but before leaving by the night train I had a grand day's driving on the neighbouring moor of Phones, with a bag of 150 brace of grouse, a day memorable to me for a wonderful exhibition of flanking solo by the head keeper in the big drive of the day.

Early next morning I picked up my car at Peterborough and got home in time to enjoy an equally good day's partridge driving, where the bag curiously enough was only three brace short of that on the previous day in Scotland.

Clay Pigeon Shooting

Fixture List

Aug. 18: North Wales D.T.L. and Double Rise Championships, North Wales G.C., Rhosesmor, Mold, Flintshire. 9 a.m.

Aug. 18: Leicestershire D.T.L. Championship. Deer's Leap, G.C., Ashby-de-la-Zouch.

Aug. 18: Carlisle & District G.C. Members' D.T.L. and Sporting Conditions Club Championship Shoot. 1 p.m.

Aug. 19: Wormshill & Lynsted C.P.C., Preston Hall, Kent. Practice Shoot, 2 p.m.

Aug. 19: Coventry and District D. & G.C. Club Practice. 10.30 a.m.

Aug. 19: North of England Sporting Championship, Harrogate G.C., Yorks.

Aug. 22: Cavendish G.C., Forest Town, Mansfield.

Aug. 24: Childrey C.P.S. Club. Members' Shoot, 6 p.m.

Aug. 25: Waltham Abbey G.C., Essex. Members' Final Shoot, 2 p.m.

Aug. 25: Lancashire Sporting Championship, Bowland & District G.C., Sawley, Clitheroe.

Aug. 25: Worcestershire Sporting Championship. Birmingham G.C., Brockhill Lane, Redditch.

Aug. 25: Wetherby & District G.C., Yorks. Members' Shoot.

Aug. 25: Southern Counties Skeet Championships, Blandford & Disttrict G.C., Hedge End, Blandford, Dorset, 10.30 a.m.

Aug. 26: Olympic Trial Shoot, Bisley G.C., Surrey. 10.30 a.m.

Aug. 26: Surrey and Hampshire Skeet Championship. Grange G.C., Tongham, Nr. Farnham, Surrey.

Aug. 26: Coventry and District D. & G.C. Club Shoot. 7 p.m.

Aug. 26: Royal Oak C.P. Club, Cowfold, Sussex. Members' Shoot, 10.30 a.m.

Aug. 26th: Beverley & District G.C. 2 p.m. Open shoot.

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Reports and Results

Wigan Gun Club held a clay bird shoot at Home Farm, Shevington, on Saturday, July 28. An overcast sky and heavy rain greeted the competitors but in a short while the dark sky gave way to glorious sunshine. The proceeds of this shoot went to the Wigan and Leigh Blind Association and the Wigan Gun Club intends to hold further shoots in the near future as these events have been well attended.

* * *

For the first time on September 8 a 20-bore Skeet contest will be held by the **Bedford Gun Club** of 40 birds, 25s. one class. If sufficient guns enter this will be a championship with a permanent trophy, etc. 20-bore adaptors will be permitted in 12-bore guns and any bore smaller than 20 may also be used.

Cartridges include 20-bore; bar and light refreshments on ground. Two 20-bore guns may be available for loan by September 8. In Skeet shooting two or more men on the same squad can share a gun, so come and use your friend's 20-bore.

All the above will be shot over the four remote release Skeet layouts throwing the same regular targets as at the British Open Championship.

The Great Stag of Farley

by Dan Russell

DOWN on Exmoor they still talk about the Farley stag, but even those who are wise in the ways of the tall red deer have failed to explain the mystery; all that can be done is to record what happened and leave the reader to find what explanation he can.

Farley Farm stands at the lower end of Farley Water and beyond its meadows lies the wild expanse of Exmoor. John and Walter Lang, father and son, lived there and were both skilled harbourers of deer. It was in the summer of 1911, six years before the last season that Sidney Tucker hunted the Devon and Somerset Staghounds, that a great stag came to Farley and lay in the dense bracken that grew beside the water. He stayed there all that summer, going out at night to eat of the corn and roots and spending the hot days in his couch in the bracken.

The Devon and Somerset Staghounds leaving kennel.

John Lang watched the stag and saw him grow fat from good living. Soon the season would begin and hounds would meet at Brendon Two Gates and then the stag would have to run for his life. So Lang watched, but left the great stag undisturbed.

On the afternoon before hounds met at Brendon Two Gates, Lang looked out and saw the stag in his couch, seemingly unaware of the danger that threatened. Before dawn the next morning he was out again to watch the stag return from his foraging. The sun rose and the morning broke bright and clear, but Lang saw no stag return to his couch beside Farley Water. Cautiously he moved along, but there was no trace of deer, neither was there the mark of a slot. The stag had gone. Bitterly disappointed, Lang had to report to the Master that he had no stag for him and the hounds drew elsewhere. But within a few days the stag was back at Farley.

Vanishing Trick

The same thing happened the next time that hounds met at Brendon Two Gates; Lang saw him the afternoon before, couched in the bracken, but in the morning he was gone and once again, Lang had to report that he had no stag. A few days later it was back.

The winter came and the stag moved off to the moor to collect his hinds, but next summer he was back again in the bracken beside the water. On the afternoon before the Brendon Two Gates meet he was still there, apparently serene and undisturbed, but on the following morning he was gone and again Lang had to report failure. Two or three days later the stag returned.

He stayed in Farley for six summers. Sometimes when Sidney brought the tufters into Farley the stag was there, but he was too clever for them. There was always another stag in Farley Wood to take his place, while he disappeared into some hiding place of his own. But more often than not the old stag simply was not there.

There came a day when the Langs knew there were six or seven stags in Farley Wood including the old one. They harboured him there in the wood and the tufters put him up, but it was a young deer which went away and took the tufters to Countisbury Church before they could be stopped.

In the meantime, Walter Lang saw the old stag leave the wood and lie up in a clump of furze in the middle of a field close by the farm. The clump was so small that no one would have dreamed of a stag lying there. When the huntsman came back Walter Lang showed him where the stag was lying. The huntsman rode over and looked at him and the stag never moved. The huntsman went off and unkennelled the pack and put them into the furze clump. The hounds drove through the clump and round the stag, but still he did not move; they drove on to another clump and another stag jumped up in front of them and they went for a long way before they could be stopped.

Always a Fresh Stag

When the huntsman brought back the pack Walter Lang rode into the furze and put up the old stag, which went into the wood with the pack right at his heels. But it was another stag which came out on the other side. The old one had done them again.

So it went on; sometimes he had gone away and sometimes he was there, but he always had another stag to take up the running. But in the end they got him, and his death was one of the strangest parts of the story.

It was October and the old stag had gone from Farley. It was the last day of stag-hunting and hounds had met at Cloutsham. They ran a stag into the Culbone Woods where they lost him and Sidney was casting over the heather when the old stag jumped up right in front of him. Sidney knew him at once. "It's the Farley stag," he yelled and laid on the pack. The stag set his head for the open moor.

Now here again was a queer thing. The old stag was no fool and he must have heard hounds drawing near and known that his best chance was to lie still. But he was unlucky and the hounds put him up. But why did he head for the open moor when close at hand were the great cliffs and thickets of Glenthorne where he could easily have evaded hounds? Was it that down there were his hinds whom he would have put in danger had he turned that way? We shall never know. But it is on record that, although there were many hiding places he could have turned to, the old stag did not lose touch with hounds. He led them over the moor away from the Culbone coverts where his hinds lay, to the valley of Horner and here at long last his luck left him.

He dodged and turned in Horner for a long time until, at Luccombe Allers where the hill is so steep as to be almost a precipice, his foot slipped, his antlers caught in the scrub and he hung there. Sidney saw him and climbed up and took him and that was the end of the Farley stag. "If it hadn't been for him getting hung up we should never have got un," said Sidney. The head was given to Walter Lang; big in the beam it had four on top on one side and five on top with the offer of a sixth on the other.

By another odd coincidence Sidney Tucker killed the Farley stag on the very last day on which he hunted hounds.

Wildfowling Clubs

The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland: Hon. Secretary, Brig. G. D. Holmes, Burnham Thorpe, Nr. King's Lynn, Norfolk.

SECRETARY'S NOTES

There will be a meeting of the Executive Committee on September 15, at 2 p.m., at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham. It will be a particularly important meeting because it may well be the last before the annual general meeting in March, 1957, and because it is the first under the new sub-committee organisation. It is, therefore, hoped that as many members of the Executive Committee, and as many representatives of Wildfowling Associations as possible will attend.

CLUB REPORTS

A clay pigeon shoot will be held by The Kent W.A. on August 19, at the Wormshill and Lynsted Club's grounds, which are just off the A.20 (London-Maidstone) Road adjacent to Preston Hall, near Maidstone, at 2.30 p.m. This will be a 12-bird skeet competition. Entrance fee, including cost of pigeons, 5s. per person. Cartridges which must be bought on the grounds will be available at 14s. 3d. for box of 25 (i.e., say, one box between two persons).

The annual general meeting of the Association will be held later on August 19—at 7.45 p.m., at The Wig and Gown, Maidstone.

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The shoot arranged by The Royal Oak Clay Pigeon Club at Cowfold on August 4, in aid of the Chichester Harbour, and the Adur Valley Wildfowlers' Associations, raised £4 16s. The money is being divided between the two clubs.

The event was a 10-bird down-the-rise, and was won by a Mr. Egglington. Three people tied for second Mr. Sims, Lt.-Col. W. H. R. Dulton, and Mr. Hugh Williams; on the shoot-off Sims was second and Col. Dulton third.

The prizes which were donated were: 1st, a glass-topped tray with an Old Brighton coaching scene; 2nd, a glass-topped tray with a wildfowling scene; 3rd, a set of six cocktail mats with wildfowling scenes.

The uses of publicity were evident by the subscriptions and new member for the Adur Valley W.A. that Hugh Williams (treasurer) was seen collecting.

* * *

There will be a members' meeting of The Home Counties W.A. at St. Hubert's, House, 53 Green Street, London, W.1, today, August 17, at 7 p.m. The entertainment will take the form of a "Mixed Bag." "Bells on Her Toes"—a sound film about the training of a young falcon, and three short colour films on fishing will be shown. The evening will be rounded off with a talk on a shooting subject.

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(Continued on page 544, col. 3)

This picture proved at least that two dogs had been hunting.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

IT is my belief that a camera can sometimes be useful to the gamekeeper in the course of his work; and if we ever do get a College of Game Preservation (as advocated in the past by certain enthusiasts) I feel sure that a proper understanding of this instrument will be taught; for the gamekeeper is, after all a private policeman, and therefore just as liable to need pictorial evidence as members of the Police Force. The fact that few gamekeepers carry a camera regularly proves only that the others have never realised its possibilities fully, although the odd photographers among them could probably demonstrate in a convincing fashion that pictures are often superior to words.

For example, a gamekeeper known to me who is well aware of the value of visual evidence discovered some years ago that a shrub had been dug up and removed from a covert on his beat, apparently by some unauthorised person, because an attempt had been made to hide the hole which the roots had once occupied. He searched around, and noticed that a motor vehicle had approached the covert from an unusual direction. This was proved by the tyre marks on a meadow bridge of a primitive kind; but unfortunately there were sheep in the meadow, and there was every indication that they would obliterate the evidence before anyone else could see it. Therefore, the gamekeeper photographed the tyre marks along with an unmistakeable characteristic of the bridge, and thus a valuable bit of evidence was preserved. Ultimately the shrub was found in the grounds of the person who was most likely to have used that route.

Walking Wood-Pile

On another occasion that same keeper discovered a heap of wood in an unfrequented situation outside a covert. This suggested that the wood had been taken by an unauthorised person, and that it might vanish before enquiries could be made. So a photograph was taken, which fixed the exact position of the heap. And it was taken none too soon. The wood vanished, but the picture remained to prove that the gamekeeper had not invented a story to bring someone into disrepute.

In the days when rabbits were so plentiful everywhere that they had often to take the blame for careless farming methods, I have several times photographed sheep browsing in young cornfields and among sprouting turnips, so that I might have incontestable evidence, if someone felt inclined to try out the old-fashioned excuse. Like the gamekeeper whom I have already mentioned, I always included enough of the surroundings to show decisively where the sheep were. No doubt, sheep leave evidence in the shape of droppings and footings when they break into cropped fields, but the landowner or estate factor may not be able to detect this evidence, if a complaint of rabbit damage is put in by the farmer a week or two after sheep have damaged the crops. Only a photograph can carry sufficient conviction then to help the gamekeepeer.

Pictorial Records of Poachers

There is also some use for a camera in making pictorial records of poachers and habitual trespassers, who have only verbal permission from tenants to shoot over farmland. I will admit that it is not easy to get good pictures of those people, but I have succeeded on more than one occasion in getting excellent results. Even if evidence of this sort is not used in a court of magistrates, it may be interesting to an employer who often does not know that some farmers encourage all and sundry on their land. It would be possible for a really keen photographer to take pictures of poachers at night with flash equipment, although they would only serve to support the gamekeeper's estimate of the enemy's identity. Nevertheless, a record of a night poacher is valuable.

In daylight, when poachers can generally see the gamekeeper approaching, success depends on quick, unexpected action with the camera, if the trespassers decide to brazen out their offence. No doubt, there may be some risk of physical assault in a situation of this sort, but the gamekeeper is quite entitled to photograph evidence on his own territory; so he would at least be on the right side of the law. I have photographed rabbiters in this fashion while they were engaged in digging a burrow, and therefore did not note my advance until I was within six yards of them. As soon as they lifted their heads I released the shutter, and got perfect evidence without any threat of physical violence to myself.

Even if poachers are not visible, a picture of their car parked in a shady lane might have its uses. It would certainly refresh the gamekeeper's memory, if it were discovered elsewhere on the estate at a future time. A good picture of a hunting dog, such as a lurcher, which belonged to unseen poachers could also have some value, because poachers are apt to deny vehemently that they or their dogs have ever trespassed before. And photographs of dogs scouring the countryside alone far from their homes might be particularly useful, if damage were done in a rearing field or in the coverts among foster-mother hens. We are all familiar with the usual defence put up by owners of destructive dogs. Like the poachers, they protest loudly that their animals have never been loose.

Natural History and the Camera

Apart from utility work, the gamekeeper has unique opportunities for getting uncommon records of natural history, which might give pleasure to many people who are not so fortunately placed as he is. It is true, of course, that a gamekeeper who spent too much time at this hobby would neglect his ordinary duties to some extent; so it could not be practised freely without the full consent of his employer. But an occasional shot of something rare and interesting among wildlife could hardly be forbidden to anyone, although it might entail the use of more expensive equipment. One lens is not really enough when a photographer wishes to portray wild creatures in their natural haunts, and cameras which take interchangeable lenses cost more money than the average gamekeeper is able to afford. Despite this drawback, an enthusiast with a sufficient knowledge of a one lens camera's limitations could photograph wild life at times in a fairly satisfactory fashion.

The main requisite is a lens of first-class resolution, even when it is used at big apertures. This allows one to enlarge part of a negative without losing much details, although it is unlikely to be such a good picture as a contact print. However, one must sacrifice something; and it is better to use a small, handy instrument than to carry something which would be unduly conspicuous on a gamekeeper's person as well as difficult to manipulate at a moment's notice. My own choice for routine snapping would be a 35 mm. without bellows in an ever-ready case. A camera of this size could be pre-adjusted to suit the prevailing light, and focused at 30 feet, so that the gamekeeper would simply have to set the shutter and release it without further trouble, if necessary. It could be loaded with colour film, and the resulting transparencies projected on a screen, which gives a very clear image; but colour is not so easy to expose as black and white film, and its limitations might cause it to fail in the hands of an inexperienced man.

To return to poachers for a moment, there can be no doubt that those nuisances are more uneasy when they are within range of a gamekeeper who is known to take pictures of them in action on every possible occasion. Soon they believe that they have been photographed in incriminating situations, although they have not seen the photographer. This fact was brought to my notice a few years ago. A gamekeeper was supposed to have snapped some of the fraternity operating just over the boundary on another estate, whereas he had never seen them there at any time. But their bitter remarks convinced him that they disliked exceedingly to have evidence fixed in this matter. Furthermore, they had only a very vague idea of the effectiveness of a camera lens (even of a telephoto one) for rendering detail at a distance, and this ignorance only helped to increase their bitterness.

ON HOW TO SEX A BIRD

by Dr. James M. Harrison

THIS article is made, by editorial request, to help those whose zeal has often provoked a sense of frustration when presented with a species in which no unequivocal plumage distinction exists to pronounce a bird as male or female.

It is here perhaps advisable to stress the fact that in scientific ornithology a specimen is not labelled positively as a male or as a female on plumage alone, but only if this has been determined anatomically. Most sportsmen will without doubt be familiar with the cocky-hen pheasant, which is frequently referred to as a "mule." In its most advanced state the cocky-hen pheasant can very closely resemble the old cock, complete with glossy iridescent head and neck, well-marked ear-tufts, a fully developed white neck ring and strongly developed spurs. This condition was accurately described as long ago as 1827 by William Yarrell[1] and was the subject of a subsequent research by the present writer in 1932.[2]

Quite apart from this, a few cases have been recorded of a complete sex reversal from a functional cock to a functional hen.

Space does not permit a full discussion of the anomalies of secondary sexual characters in birds, fascinating as this subject is, but a few fundamental facts must precede the practical considerations of our task. Sexual dimorphism is constituted by a difference in primary and secondary sexual characters, and can be classed and recognised as affecting structure, plumage, voice, deportment and behaviour.

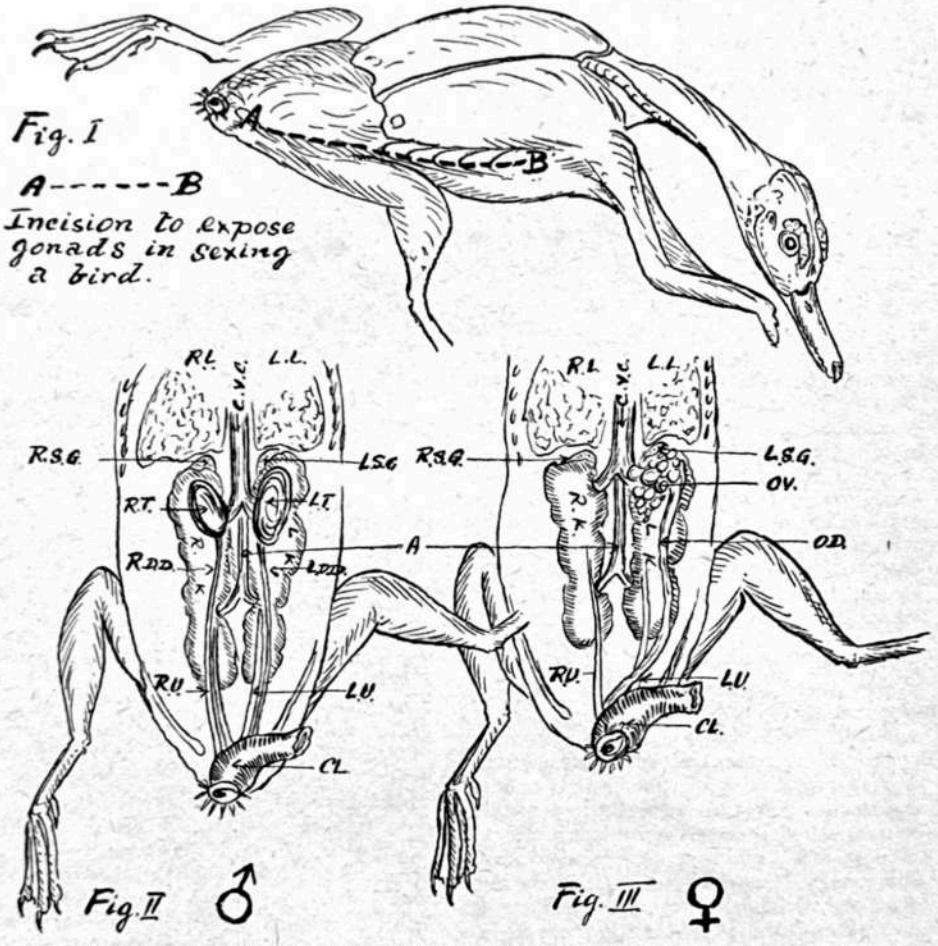
The only primary sexual character is that of the different sex glands in the two sexes, the testes in the male and the ovary in the female. All other sexual differences are referred to as secondary sexual characters, including all other anatomical differences—in the male the deferent ducts, which convey the male germ cells from the testes and in the female the oviduct, which conducts the female egg cells (which form the vital nucleus of the egg) towards the cloaca to await extrusion.

A male bird normally possesses two functional testes, a female bird one functional ovary. To this generalisation, however, there is an exception, for many birds of prey normally possess two ovaries. In species possessing one ovary, this is situated in the left and upper part of the back of the abdominal cavity, while situated at the same level in the male, the paired testes are visible.

Mention must be made here of the method originated by Hochbaum[3] (1942) and elaborated by Hanson[4] (1949) of determining the age (and incidentally the sex) of Canada geese and other wildfowl from the cloacal characters. By means of a nasal speculum the interior of the cloaca is inspected, when the copulatory organ of the male or the opening of the oviduct in the female can be demonstrated. The technique is applicable to either live or dead birds. Its greatest use is to the conservationist and game farmer in the management of their stock. Undoubtedly accurate sexing can be obtained from the cloacal characters, but of course the final criterion, i.e. the presence of the testes or the ovary is not established.

Let us assume that we have a bird of indeterminate sex on external signs. In order to expose the gonads (a term used to indicate either the testes or ovary) an incision has to be made along the *left* side of the body as shown in the diagram (Fig. I). This is best done with scissors and should only divide the thin lateral abdominal wall and the ribs. Now gently open the incision and expose the back of the abdominal cavity. Great gentleness is needed and the intestines are to be pushed forwards with a blunt, flat instrument. On doing this the following should be observed:—

1. The dark red organs which fill the hollows of the bird's pelvis and are the equivalent of the mammalian kidneys.
2. The paired testes in the male, lying at the upper ends of the kidneys. These may be black or whitish, or one black and one white. In the case of the female, the ovary is situated at the upper end of the left kidney.
3. The deferent ducts in the male or the oviduct in the female should be sought for now, the latter running downwards and inwards on the surface of the left kidney.



R.T.—Right testis. L.T.—Left testis. R.D.D.—Right ductus deferens. L.D.D.—Left ductus deferens. R.L.—Right lung. L.L.—Left lung. C.Y.C.—Caudal vena cava. R.S.G.—Right suprarenal gland. L.S.G. Left suprarenal gland. A.—Aorta. R.K.—Right kidney. L.K.—Left kidney. R.U.—Right ureter. L.U. Left ureter. Cl. Cloaca. Ov.—Ovary. Od.—Oviduct.

Emphasis on Suprarenal Glands

It is important to note that at the upper ends of the kidneys the minute paired suprarenal glands are situated. These are often, particularly in young birds, more conspicuous than the testes or ovary. Both species possess these essential glands and they must therefore be clearly recognised if correct sexing is to be accomplished. They are usually crescentic or triangular in outline and somewhat yellowish in colour. The anatomical relationships of these various structures is shown diagrammatically in the sketches (Figs. II & III).

All these structures can be exposed satisfactorily by the method described. If the overlying structures are roughly handled, there is a danger of tearing away the testes in the males, as these are not firmly attached.

Sexing birds in full reproductive activity is easy, but in the period of reproductive quiescence and in very young birds it can be extremely difficult, in fact sometimes impossible by the naked eye. This is no reflection upon the skill of the investigator, but naturally success depends upon experience and it should be noted that damage, decomposition and even long refrigeration can all so affect a bird's organs as to defeat the best efforts of the most experienced operator.

One further word in the case of hybrids, particularly where hybridisation between species has occurred. It would be wise in all such instances to submit the specimen while still fresh to the expert in such matters, for often complex intersexual modifications are found and these need skilled interpretation and microscopical investigation to determine the many interesting scientific problems involved and demand a knowledge of endocrinology, which cannot be expected of the layman.

It so happens that hybridisation amongst the different game birds and also between duck and geese of various species is relatively common. Such specimens are of first rate scientific importance, offering as they do valuable clues as to the functions and balance of the ductless glands and the effects of hormones, or indica-

(Continued on page 551, col. 3)

1 Yarrell, William, 1827. "The Change in the Plumage of some Hen Pheasants." Philosophical Transactions, London, pp. 1-8, 1 plate.

2 Harrison, James M., 1932. "A Series of Nineteen Pheasants presenting Anomalous Secondary Sexual Characters in Association with Changes in the Ovaries." Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond. pp. 193-203, 4 plates.

3 Hochbaum, H. Albert, 1942. "Sex and Age determination of Waterfowl by Cloacal Examination." Trans. N. American Wildlife Conference, 7 pp. 299-307.

4 Hanson, Harold C., 1949. "Methods of determining Age in Canada Geese and other Waterfowl." Journal Wildlife Management, 13.2, pp. 177-183, 2 plates.

Blackgame

by Edgar N. Barclay

FIFTY years ago the decrease in blackgame was a subject for debate, and so it is still, but are we, I wonder, any nearer knowing the true reasons for this decrease than were those who discussed the matter half a century and more ago.

Blackgame are birds of the wilderness and require not only the terrain of the wilderness, but also its natural and primitive conditions. Land development and improvement, drainage schemes, and the human element which produces these things are an anathema to them. They need the wide spaces of desolate heathlands, undrained rushy flats, sparsely timbered river valleys, the shelter of some denser woodland, which for their preference should include Scots fir, larch and birch, and the very minimum of disturbance.

The area in Britain where such conditions still exist grows steadily less, particularly in England. Blackgame survived on Surrey commons even up to my own time, but since these

A likely place for blackcock on the fringe of the moor.

commons became the week-end playground of thousands from the great metropolis there is little of the wilderness about them now ; empty bottles, ice-cream cartons and other litter have taken the place of the blackgame ; and so in county after county the story has been repeated ; it is a tale of diminishing numbers or complete extinction, and only in Scotland and the Border Country can one now find conditions in keeping with the birds' requirements.

Since the last war there have even been reports from some districts on both sides of the Border of a very slight increase, which is probably due to some improvement in the vermin position. In the years immediately following the war the number of hooded-crows in the Border country had to be seen to be believed. They quartered the moors in such numbers that they might easily have been mistaken for rooks, and the marvel was that any other bird ever managed to rear a brood at all. The position is still bad, however, resulting from few gamekeepers and large areas of entirely unkeepered land where vermin can breed unchecked. This probably affects blackgame more seriously than grouse, since much blackgame country is closer to these verminous tracts.

Greyhens As Mothers

Another adverse influence is the fact that greyhens are not such good mothers as grouse, so that more of their chicks are almost certainly lost, and the percentage which reach maturity is probably lower than with any of our game birds.

It follows, therefore, that blackgame should be more lightly shot than grouse, but all too often the reverse is the case. With the breaking up of large estates bits of shooting are let annually to individuals or syndicates. In many cases the shooting tenants do not get very much for their money, so I suppose they are hardly to be blamed if they shoot what blackgame when they can, but such a policy can only have one end, and in due course there will be no blackgame left on the ground. They can also be over-shot through what amounts to misunderstanding, for when they congregate in the autumn they are drawn together from over wide areas, and the relatively large packs are apt to give a false impression of local abundance.

The proportion of cocks to hens that should be left for breeding is a vexed question, but though blackgame are polygamous, or at any rate promiscuous, I always rather mistrust any estimates that are much at variance with nature's laws. I have the conviction that factors not immediately apparent may discount such neat mathematical calculations as so many cocks to so many hens should provide so many nests with so many eggs yielding so many birds. In practice things never work out that way, and the fact should not be lost sight of that in the spring greyhens are great wanderers, and unless there are sufficient cocks some hens may never be mated at all. Almost every writer on the subject has stressed the necessity of leaving plenty of hens, but plenty of cocks as well as hens is certainly the most natural and probably the soundest advice, though the real old stagers of both sexes should be eliminated as far as possible. A miniature rifle and a pair of field glasses probably provide the best means of attaining this end.

Pheasants and Blackgame

It has been suggested that the increase of wild pheasants is a contributory cause to the decrease in blackgame. Typical blackgame country is also ideal for wild pheasants, and as the natural increase of the latter is certainly greater than the former there may be something in the theory. I am not aware that it has ever been proved that the two birds are actually antagonistic to one another, but in restricted areas pheasants might gain a monopoly by mere abundance, for no ground can support unlimited numbers of either, and pheasants, by their more rapid increase, would tend to oust the blackgame.

We speak of ideal blackgame country, meaning the type of land on the fringe of the moor, and the partly timbered valleys with their streams or burns that lead down from the high ground to the low, but that is only a superficial view, and the birds themselves evidently look for certain qualities not apparent to us. Thirty years ago I knew quite well the Wauchope valley in Dumfriesshire, as I frequently fished the little stream of the same name from its junction with the Border Esk to its source in the hills. This valley was famed for its blackgame, and there on October 11, 1910, four guns shot 93 blackgame, mostly cocks, together with 33 head of other game, yet there was nothing that the eye could discern to distinguish that particular valley from hundreds of others just like it to be found north of the Border. In that valley were blackgame in plenty, yet from other valleys, apparently so similar, blackgame have vanished. They do not normally migrate, so that can hardly be the explanation of their disappearance, and it is particularly noteworthy that where blackgame have died out attempts to reintroduce them never seem to have met with any success. When adult, they are such omnivorous feeders that it is difficult to believe that the absence of some particular food could not be compensated for by others, but if their disappearance is in any way connected with food, perhaps the failure of certain insect supplies is responsible, as the young birds are largely insect eaters. Our imperfect knowledge of the natural history of blackgame, particularly in the chick stage, is no doubt the cause of the lack of success that has attended efforts to hand-rear them, and there is certainly scope for a detailed investigation into their life-history.

Protection in Scandinavia

The reduction in numbers is not confined to Britain, for in Scandinavia a similar decrease has been noted. Dr. Bertil Haglund tells me that since 1935 the decrease in Sweden has been particularly marked, and in many parts of that country they were given complete protection.

It is of course possible that the species may be in a state of natural decline, but so fastidious a bird must be particularly susceptible to any interference by man. Which of these causes is mainly responsible for its diminishing numbers one cannot say, but it may well be a combination of both.

Apart from their value as game, blackgame are among the most interesting and distinctive birds. Their remarkable courtship and display habits have often been described, but I do not recall seeing any mention of the great distances at which blackcocks in display can be spotted. As they pivot round with their tails fully spread

Waiting for driven blackgame.

and the white underparts fully exposed they can be seen from afar. I have watched from a point on the Great North Road, during early mornings in spring, these specks of white, looking like disappearing or slowly moving targets on the distant hillside. The birds themselves were quite invisible to the naked eye, but the glass would reveal half-a-dozen or more cocks on an old established lekking ground. Morning after morning they would be there, their presence quite unsuspected except by those who could interpret the moving specks of white.

October is the real month for blackgame shooting when the birds have attained full plumage, but the majority of visiting sportsmen who go north for grouse shooting have left before that date, and so to many shooting men blackgame are considered of less importance than grouse.

Fisherman's Diary

MY father was an angler who brought me up in the way he thought I should go. As an angler I hope I am a credit to him, though I have dropped below his standards in other directions. As a small boy I was, therefore, fishing with a rod and line when my school companions were getting a lot of fun from tickling, guddling or groping trout—whatever the local name for the sport may be.

My attitude then was a smug one, and I affected to despise those of my companions who tickled to their doom much better trout than I could catch by more orthodox methods. There must have been, too, a taste of sour grapes about my priggish attitude, for on the few occasions when I climbed down from my pedestal and tried to tickle trout myself I was a woefully indifferent performer.

Two or three times a year I see fathers bring their sons down to our local stream to teach them how to tickle trout. If I were a good citizen and a 100-per-cent supporter of the River Board from which I buy a licence to fish that same stream, I suppose I should report and subsequently give evidence against them.

It is not the thought of wasting time in court that deters me, but a disagreement with the fundamental principle. The trout are not being caught for gain, unless a supper can be called gain, nor are sufficient caught to bring in more than a couple of shillings even if a market was available—which it is not. From the viewpoint of trout stocks the matter is negligible. The art of tickling trout (for art it is) is dying out. It stands, perhaps, on a level with thatching, and there are probably about as many master-ticklers as there are master-thatchers. I should hate to see either fade out altogether.

Nevertheless, the method is in places illegal and the law should be upheld. Sentiment must give way to the angler's righteous wrath when he sees good trout being guddled, and the culprits must pay for their unorthodox methods if they are caught and convicted.

Tickling Law

I selected the subject of trout tickling because I read that among a dozen prosecutions connected with angling recently brought by the Trent River Board, three were for taking trout by tickling—"a prohibited mode." Every case must be judged on the local circumstances, and any comment after judgment from someone who knows nothing about the cases would be insolent and worthless.

Presumably there is a Trent River Board by-law which makes the method illegal. I cannot find any statutory clause prohibiting trout tickling as a *method* of taking trout. The offence usually comes under the head of taking trout (by any method) from water on which the offender has no right to be.

Streamer Flies

I have been asked by a newcomer to fly fishing whether streamer flies can be used on "fly-fishing only" water. I replied to him privately, but as it is a subject on which I feel strongly I will enlarge upon it here.

First, the word "streamer" came, I believe, from America, and fly-dressers in that country have created a long list of patterns, for which specialised literature is not wanting. The standard American streamers are tied on hooks with turned-down eyes and shanks normally 1¼in. in length. The bodies are built up to about ⅛in. diameter, and ribbed. Whisks are by no means sparse and are clearly visible: some patterns have thick tags in place of whisks. There is usually a little hackle on the underside of the head end. The main part of the lure consists of a complete feather or feathers, tied in close to the eye of the hook and extending at least an inch beyond the bend: since they are fastened only at one point, these feathers "stream" with the current or, in still water, with the motion set up by recovery of line.

With all the feathers, hackles, body materials and ribbings available it is naturally possible to create an infinite variety of patterns. Many American dressings have fancy names, but ordinary ones such as smelt, golden perch, dace and brook trout indicate clearly enough that their purpose is to imitate small fish.

The British equivalents are usually called lures or tandems, and most of them differ from the American patterns by being tied on two or three connected small hooks.

Streamer-fishing Ethics

These streamers, tandems or lures play an important part in fresh and saltwater angling, for they simulate with considerable success the small fish they are meant to represent. They can be used without qualm of conscience in many places and on many occasions, but I object to their use on "fly only" waters. Because they are made of feathers they seem to qualify as flies, and on two of the three "fly only" reservoirs I fish regularly they are the accepted thing—though if I ventured to use a tiny fly spoon I should be hounded off the premises while a line of disapproving Batemanfaces witnessed my expulsion with glee. In one instance the water bailiff recommends and sells such lures.

Streamers are excellent deceivers, but they seek to imitate fish. They should be placed in the spinner category wherever local rules forbid spinning.

"Trent Otter"

One hundred years ago John Williams Martin was born in Lincolnshire. Fifty years ago the third and fourth of his half-dozen books were published. These were, "My Fishing Days and Fishing Ways" and "Practical Fishing for So-called Coarse Fishes." As the second title shows, Martin was one of those who fought strenuously but unsuccessfully against the introduction of the word "coarse."

Before he was 20, Martin moved to Newark, and the next score of years found him fishing the Trent and writing extensively in the angling Press of the day under his nom-de-plume of "Trent Otter." Later he removed his fishing tackle business from Newark to London and came to know the Thames in all its moods.

Bass and Sea-Trout

I fished last week for bass in an estuary where, at low tide, sand-flats extend for about a mile across the river and the narrow deep-water channel comes close in to the rocky promontory on which I stood.

Three men in a boat operated a seine net in the vicinity and on one occasion encompassed me and my tackle. I withdrew while the net was hauled, and saw that their catch included four sea-trout.

The situation proved the presence of sea-trout and demonstrated the difference in feeding habits between these fish and bass. The trout disliked the suspended sand and were interested only in getting clear of the gut and into clearer water beyond. They were travelling, and could be caught only by net. Bass were coming up with the tide for food and could be caught on bait.

I have fished there many times with many baits (including prawn, a good estuary sea-trout bait) but I have never had an offer from a sea-trout.

CORIDON.

WILDFOWLING CLUBS

(Continued from page 540)

The second summer clay pigeon shoot was held on July 22 by the members and friends of the South Lincolnshire Wildfowlers' Club in fine and warm weather at Freiston Shore, Near Boston. Although the attendance was not quite as large as the first shoot, several members availed themselves of a bit of practice and a most enjoyable morning was had. It would have been appreciated by the officials in charge had a few more committee members been present; perhaps they will try and attend the final shoot in August, as it would help considerably.

The first event was six birds down-the-line, and the winner was Mr. John Lane, the 15-year-old junior member who showed all present the correct way to kill clay birds. Not only did he win this event, but also scored a maximum at five driven birds. He was the only competitor to score a maximum. The officials in charge of the shoot were Messrs. E. Lane, Alan Day, and the Club secretary J. R. Marshall.

The Club will hold its final shoot at Freiston Shore, Near Boston, on Sunday, August 26, at 10 o'clock, and it is hoped that as many members as possible will attend, as it will give them a bit of practice for the coming season.

Mr. R. S. Marshall, the Club treasurer, informs the committee that several subscriptions are still outstanding from old members, and it will be appreciated if these could be forwarded to him as soon as possible, as the Insurance Company is requesting a full list of members for insurance purposes.

Thirteen mallard were released recently by the Club. These are the first batch to go, and they were quite strong on the wing. All are bearing W.A.G.B.I. rings, and anyone recovering any is requested to report to the W.A.G.B.I. ringing secretary, the address being on the rings. It is hoped to get away more birds before the season starts, but some rather bad luck has been experienced by the breeders.

September 8 is the date fixed for the first of the monthly meetings, this being a Saturday and the Red Cow Hotel, Wide Bargate, Boston, is the flight line. New members will be welcomed and all the old faces it is hoped will be present. Time of meeting, 7.30 p.m.

* * *

At a recent meeting of The Severn Wildfowlers' Association, a very welcome guest was the hon. secretary of W.A.G.B.I., Brigadier G. D. Holmes. He gave a very interesting talk on the constitution and objects of the Association. It was decided at this meeting to purchase a number of young mallard for release. These were ordered and arrived in due course a few days later. Some of the members set off on a Saturday evening to release them and the enclosed photo shows the enthusiastic wildfowlers turning the young ducklings loose, one member being so keen as to arrive on crutches with a broken foot.

In a recent letter from the secretary of W.A.G.B.I. it was stated that the Secretary of State having consulted the advisory committee on the protection of birds for England and Wales, proposes to make and order making the administrative county of Monmouth a prescribed area for the purpose of Section 2 of the Protection of Birds Act, 1954. Our club naturally feels concerned about this and is drawing up a petition to be sent to the Secretary of State strongly objecting to the deprival of the rights of the week-end sportsman.

As secretary of the Severn W.A., I strongly urge all sportsmen in this county to write direct to the Under Secretary of State, Home Office, Whitehall, London, S.W.1., objecting to this order. C. Brown (Monmouth).

[Unfortunately, the photographs were insufficiently clear to reproduce.—Ed.]

* * *

The monthly meeting of The Dorset Wildfowl Club was held recently at the Red Lion Hotel, Hamworthy. It was opened by the chairman, Mr. Beddingfield, welcoming Mr. Butterworth, a member of The Home Counties Wildfowlers' Club, who had come from Essex to attend the meeting.

It was encouraging to hear that out of the duck eggs purchased a few months ago fourteen duck had now been raised. A vote of thanks was accorded Mr. and Mrs. Burgess for all the trouble they had taken in the matter.

A magnificent basket of fruit was raffled, and the winner, Mr. Norman Bartlett, made a very noble gesture by giving it to Mrs. Burgess, who had taken so much trouble with the duck

The first field of oats was cut on July 21.

The Young Shot

Pigeon English

by Petrel

PIGEON are a pretty good opening conversational gambit in any rural hostelry, apart from the weather. It used to be rabbits, but nowadays men speak of them in hushed whispers, or not at all, like Scottish seamen, though from what I hear they will again be the talk of the town soon enough. Only yesterday I saw fresh, wild English rabbits in a London butcher's shop—and they were selling too.

Sunday's pre-lunch conversation was devoted almost entirely to pigeon. There was a temporary interruption when three hardy anglers, who had been weed-cutting in bathing trunks and a rain squall, made a shivering entry in search of a drop of anti-freeze, but there was plenty of room for their tiny tots amongst the decoys that littered the bar. Most types were represented and the merits of each were argued.

On one point there was general agreement. You can't beat a dead bird, especially if its eyelids are removed.

"Trouble is," said the postman, "in hot weather, like we're not getting today, they don't stay dead long enough. They're fly-blown in seconds and walking by the end of the afternoon; well, almost.'"

"Here's the answer to that," claimed the one who is a bit of everything, but especially river keeper and pigeon shooter. "I've had some of these four years. Done by an old chap in Gloucester." He produced a stuffed woodie, life-like and moth-free, with bright and greedy eyes.

All Sorts

"Light enough to carry, sure enough, but they won't stand knocking about. You've got to be careful with them, and unless you can stuff them yourself, it would cost a fortune these days," I ventured.

"You don't need many."

"You always want a lot of decoys. The more the merrier."

"Supplement 'em with these," chimed in the schoolmaster, pointing to the rubber and wooden models.

Attention focused on these and we summarised as follows:

The rubber "full-bodied" decoys are better than the "top-half" type on a peg. The former can be used for lofting. Cases of pigeon spotting the dark shadowy emptiness of the latter and being put off, were cited. If they are left in a bag for a long time the "half-birds" go soft and droop. The paint is inclined to fade. Aluminium, unless very carefully prepared and painted, is inclined to shine. This type, lino, cardboard and other decoys made of light material, blow over in a wind. When there are plenty of birds set on feeding in one particular area, decoys need not be too perfect. At other times, when there is a wide choice of feed and the birds are scattered, it is essential to use decoys which are as realistic as possible. Dead birds are best. We were back where we started.

Moving or Still?

Should they move or did it not matter, was the next question. Normally it mattered little, we decided. An occasional bob on a spring peg might be a help, but it was useless to have a whole set of decoys bowing and scraping like a Japanese delegation. Movement was only necessary to attract passing birds which had not seen the decoys, to induce them to think twice before dismissing the dummies as phoney or uninteresting. The ideal was to have one or two decoys which could be controlled by a string from the hide and made to peck or flap their wings at will.

The jack of all trades produced two answers to this problem. The first was a "pigeon iron" made by the local blacksmith. An iron "S" with the top end curtailed and sharpened to a point and the bottom end flattened, was bolted, with the aid of a washer to one end of a car engine valve spring. A sturdy peg fitted into the other end of the spring. A dead pigeon is impaled on the spike below its crop and the point is pushed up into its head to emerge just below the beak. The body of the bird rests on the lower bend of the "S"—a strip of tin through which the bolt passes extends on either side and can be pressed to shape to hold the body and wings in position—and its tail lies along the flattened tail of the "S." The whole contraption is then firmly pegged into the ground and a pull on the string attached to the spring moves the pigeon when required. The same device can be used with a lofting pole. The strength of the spring prevents the decoy dancing a fandango in a wind.

The second device was a pair of those outspread rubber wings designed to fit on to more or less any type of decoy pigeon. Again, it is no no good relying on the wind to actuate the wings. Either they flap so much that the decoy almost takes off, or they do not move at all. Controlled movement at the right moment is what is wanted, and this my friend has achieved by looping a length of 12lb. breaking strain nylon fishing line over the tip of each wing; bringing the ends down through a staple tacked on to the peg and back to the hide where they are attached to a toggle of wood. In this way a pull and release is enough to set the wings in motion on their strip steel spring.

The effectiveness of moving decoys was appreciated by the old-time pigeon shooters, but the means employed by them to achieve this end are no longer available to us in a more humanitarian age. It is strictly illegal to peg out a live decoy pigeon and with the aid of another line to tweak it off its feet so that its fluttering recovery attracts its passing fellows. Some enthusiasts still use live birds as decoys and keep within the law, by taking squabs from the nest and rearing them to become tame ringdoves. These are then taken to the scene of operations and enclosed in a low wire run which is pegged out on the field. Given a handful of corn and a tin of water they will peck about happily and pay no attention to the shooting once they become used to it. No doubt they are effective, but what a lot of trouble. With all the different types of decoy now available, including, once again, those best, dead birds, such a palaver seems to me not worth bothering about.

Our first field of winter oats was cut on July 21, and since then there has been no harvesting to speak of, although much corn will no doubt have been cut or combined by the end of this third week of August. But the recent storms have laid flat many patches, and in some cases, whole fields, and where this has happened, it makes no difference whether the crop is oats, wheat or barley. The pigeon lose no time in finding easy pickings, and are now beginning to gang up in greedy numbers, to the aggravation of the farmers and the satisfaction of the Padworth Pigeon Club.

A pigeon hide on stubble. The camouflage netting effectively breaks up the outline.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters and photographs are invited for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published. Correspondence should be addressed to The Editor, The Shooting Times & Country Magazine, 29 Old Bond Street, London, W.1. 'Phone: HYDe Park 2556/2557.

GUN LICENCES—AN ANOMALY?

Sir,—In attempting to renew my gun licence for the coming year, I discovered an apparent anomaly in the issuing of licences, on which readers may like to comment.

I asked at the Post Office on July 31 for a new gun licence, but was informed that if one was issued then, it would expire at midnight on that day. A licence for the coming year could not be issued until August 1.

On asking what would be the position had I wished to shoot at, say, 7 a.m. on August 1 before the Post Office opened, the best offer that could be made was a receipt for ten shillings, and the posting-on to me of the licence on August 1. There was, I was told, no provision for post-dating licences.

I wonder whether the Post Office receipt would be sufficient to licence one to carry and use a gun at 7 a.m. on August 1, if one was challenged by the police, or could it be that shooting on that day at that time is effectively prohibited by this method of administration?

Also, was the Post Office correct, since the wording of the licence describes its term as from the date of issue until July 31 next following? Surely a licence issued on July 31 should therefore extend until July 31 of the next year?

P. DAVID LISHMAN,
Rugby, Warwicks.

WILDFOWLING SHOW-PIECE

Sir,—I enclose a photograph of the reconstructed W.A.G.B.I. stand which was on show at Wisbech from June 6 to June 13. The details are provided in order that any other wildfowling club may make use of this excellent piece of propaganda.

From back to front the stand is five feet and the height is eight feet. The length is forty feet, but this can be reduced by bringing forward the sides.

The reconstructed W.A.G.B.I. Boat Show stand recently displayed by the Fenland W.A. (See letter, "Wildfowling Show-Piece.")

Our effort at adding to the stand was as follows: In the centre-piece we placed a sheet of glass on the counter and then covered a portion round the edge of the glass with moss and various marsh plants. This gave the impression of a small pool, and the background painting gave the impression of more water and the sky and flying duck. We then added decoys of various duck and geese and one or two stuffed waders.

Two panels to the left of the centre were adorned with pictures of various "Fenland Fowlers" taken on the marsh during the past seasons. [The side piece showing large arrow and history of wildfowling are out of sight on the left of the main scene—Editor.]

The two panels to the right were used to feature the Association's activities in vermin control and duck rearing.

A nesting basket was also displayed and the sheets advertising the official organ of W.A.G.B.I., *The Shooting Times*, completed a very impressive display.

Any club which may decide to use the stand, but finds itself short of photographs, may obtain these on loan, free, by applying to me.

I am sorry for the delay in providing this news, but I have been otherwise engaged—having my appendix removed, but fit now and looking forward to the "best time of the year."

C. E. HENNELS,
5 Magazine Lane, Wisbech, Cambs.

LANGSTONE HARBOUR

Sir,—It is proposed to hold a meeting at The Black Dog, West Street, Havant, on Saturday, August 25, at 6.30 *sharp*, in order to form a wildfowl association in this area.

D. S. HOWE,
3 Jubilee Villas, West Lane, Hayling Island.

PEA-EGGS

Sir,—I read with interest "Tower-Bird's" remarks in the issue for July 20 on the subject of the midget moorhen egg, but I am afraid that he cannot claim to be the discoverer of *Gallinula Tichius*, as I have an egg of the moorhen exactly answering his description which was taken in the marshes near Southend ten years ago. In actual fact, I think that the incidence of these diminutive eggs is not rare, though uncommon enough to be very interesting. A true "runt" or "pygmy" egg contains no yolk at all, only albumen, but yolk may be found in some eggs which are almost small enough to be considered "runts."

I can think of no species more likely to show this abnormality than another, and I have personally witnessed it in black-headed gull, rook, robin, great spotted woodpecker, chaffinch and blackbird, while I have a remarkable egg of the lapwing which is only the size of a thrush's egg. The most unusual thing about this latter is that it was given me from a nestful of four all the same. This is most rare, since "runt" eggs are normally single aberrations in an otherwise typical set.

In addition to the above, which I have seen myself, I have heard of "runts" in most of the common species, and I am sure that all species are liable to this peculiarity at times. At the other end of the scale, I think oversized eggs are much rarer, and I only remember finding one really "giant" egg, and that was a double-yolked egg in an otherwise ordinary clutch of 7 of the magpie.

A.P. SHORTER,
Ilford, Essex.

ATOMIC POWER AND THE BRENT

Sir,—I have seen no mention of the proposed Atomic Power Station to be erected at Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex, in the pages of your excellent journal.

I watched the interminable Governmental rigmarole played out over public enquiries, etc., with a great deal of interest, as I believe that this is one of the very few and, by far the most, prolific areas in Great Britain for *zos* grass.

From what I gather, by way of the newspapers, the waste water to be discharged from this station, is liable seriously to affect the oyster and fishing industries round the mouth of the River Blackwater. Therefore, it follows to me, that this discharge will also kill the *zos* grass on which, as you well know, during the winter, feed the protected brent geese in very large numbers.

Perhaps the Government only passed "that Bill," to protect this goose, in order to make it extinct in this country by destroying its natural food with noxious effluence.

B. L. KEY,
Kenley, Surrey.

[Mention of the erection of this power station was made in *The Shooting Times* some while ago. Happily, with the sad decrease in *zos* grass, brent have turned to other fare and seem to thrive on it, though a return of *zos* will be welcome to the brent and to us.—Ed.]

WOODCOCK

Sir,—During the various occasions on which the controversy of whether or not woodcock carry their young has been aired in your journal I have been very interested in the matter, particularly so at the present time.

Now, I have never seen a woodcock carry its young. In fact, I have seen but one woodcock, and that several years ago at Buffalo Lake,

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Sask., while I was after the duck. How this one came to stray "out west" I have no idea, and the fact that I had actually seen a woodcock did not really "register" until the bird was past me. However it was a woodcock and easily recognisable as such from the numerous pictures of the bird that I have seen. Although my experience with woodcock is confined to this incident, I am quite prepared to believe that these birds really do carry their young in time of stress, and my basis for doing so is that I, personally, have seen a wild duck carry its ducklings.

A matter of twenty-five years ago (in the spring of 1931, to be precise) I stayed with a friend on his farm at Silver Lake, some 14 miles north of Cupar, Sask., and one day, as I was prowling through the bush armed with a .22 and in search of crows and other predators I came upon a small slough (pond) surrounded on three sides by poplars and brush on the surface of which was a duck with a young brood. The ducklings were probably not more than two or three days old.

As I walked slowly along the shore, the duck became alarmed and swam away ahead of her brood; a matter of ten feet separated her from the youngsters. Then, becoming more alarmed still, she called agitatedly to them, whereon they "scuttered" up to her (they literally ran on the surface in the manner of very young ducklings) and when the group reached the mother, five of them took hold of her breast-feathers in their little bills and the mother immediately "took off." When a few feet above the water, one of the little fellows lost its hold and fell back to the water, while the mother flew off in the direction of a neighbouring slough with the other four dangling from her breast-feathers. Those left behind (including the one that lost its hold on its mother) immediately "scuttered" across the water and took cover in the underbrush on the far shore to where I was standing.

At that period "Scolopax" was a contributor to *The Shooting Times* and I wrote to him regarding the incident, the account of which you published. And I repeat what I said at that time, I was merely pottering round trying to pick up a few predators, was not thinking about birds transporting their young, and was 14 miles from the nearest alcohol.

Let us analyse the above incident. The mother duck exhibited strong signs of alarm. Her brood was several feet to the rear of her and came at her call. Some of them climbed aboard and were whisked away. There was no question of them being accidentally caught up under a tail or in her feathers (as "Tower-Bird" opines might happen in cases where woodcock have been stated to carry their young). Instead, they came in direct response to their mother's call and executed a definite manoeuvre. Since that time I have met another man who has seen the same phenomenon.

But to return to the woodcock. In the very excellent volume, "Birds of America," prepared under the auspices of the University Society (Editor-in-Chief T. Gilbert Pearson, President of the National Association of Audubon Societies) and published by Garden City Books, Garden City, New York, U.S.A., Mr. R. I. Brasher states, in his description of the habits of the woodcock, ". . . The mother woodcock has a curious and interesting habit of flying off, when disturbed, with a young chick grasped between her feet or between her thighs. If she has an opportunity, she will convey all her babies, one at at time, to a place of security."

In my humble opinion, this statement of cold fact (coming presumably from an experienced ornithologist who is most unlikely to have any interest in the controversy aired in the pages of *The Shooting Times)* is very strong evidence that woodcock do indeed carry their young. Incidentally, the volume from which the above excerpt was taken was first copyright in 1917, so presumably the opinion that woodcock do carry their young has been held for a long time.

I might add that the Editorial Staff which produced "Birds of America" consisted of eight members (including the Editor-in-Chief, already mentioned, and exclusive of three artists), while the Advisory Board consisted of no less than 19 members, many of them being professors or assistant professors at such outstanding Universities as Cornell, Leland Stanford, etc., while other members of the Board were associated with various museums and natural history societies. In view of the impressive array of scientists who formed the Advisory Board, I find it very hard to believe that any inaccuracies or "hearsay" would be allowed to creep into such an outstanding volume.

It occurs to me that, in view of the intense interest that is taken in wildlife in America, there is a possibility that the phenomenon of a woodcock transporting its young may have been photographed, and with this thought in mind I am listing, on a separate sheet, the names of the Editorial Staff and also the Advisory Board responsible for production of "Birds of America" in case any of my fellow readers should wish to contact one or more of these men in an endeavour to discover if the act of a woodcock carrying its young has ever been caught on a film.

L. M. KILMISTER,
Silton, Sask.

[Space does not allow us to print the list, but if any reader wishes to write to the American addresses mentioned, he may obtain them from this office.—Ed.]

VERMIN DESTRUCTION

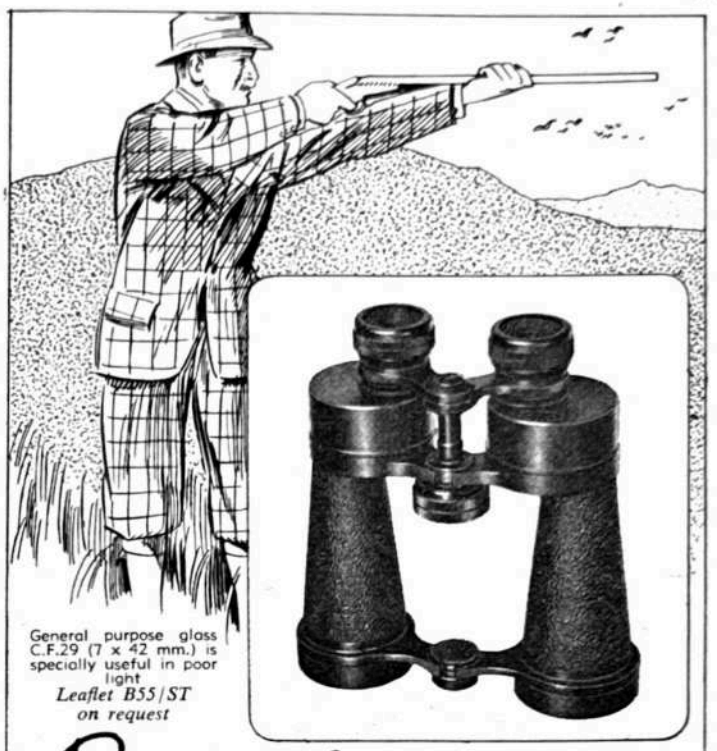
Sir,—Every year I spend the last week of the Easter holidays vermin nesting on my father's shoot.

In 1955 I succeeded in destroying 236 magpies and 52 carrion crows (birds and eggs). This year, in the first seven months, I have accounted for 135 magpies and 45 carrion crows.

I take with me a sharp 'beet knife (for chopping through thick hedges), a saw and a 12ft. ladder for climbing tree trunks. I go out from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., taking my lunch with me.

Can any other readers beat these numbers?

FOXY,
Newark, Notts.



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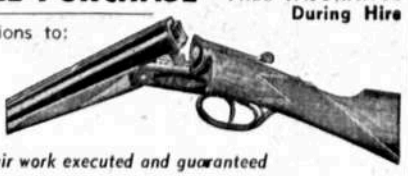

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Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

TWO training queries reached me by the same post this week, one relating to hard mouth in a springer spaniel, and the other to the refusal to deliver game by a labrador. Both these gundog "complaints" are comparatively common, although fortunately these days hardness of mouth is becoming rarer in dogs bred of good working strain.

Most cases of hard mouth which crop up can be traced to some accident or unfortunate incident over which the handler had no control, and in some cases to unwise and ignorant handling. Many dogs will treat their first few game specimens roughly, due either to excitement or uncertainty, and I never worry unduly if a pupil is rough with its first bird or two. I have worried so much in the past about such things, only to find that they right themselves, that I have become philosophical about them.

Straight away I will say that I do not believe that there is any cure for a confirmed hard mouth — certainly no permanent cure. We read in old sporting books about dummies which have needles or nails sticking out of them, of hedgehog skins, of beatings and mouth pinchings. I have no faith in any of these so-called cures for real hard mouth, although the lip pinching and scolding idea may sometimes work with a dog which is a borderline case.

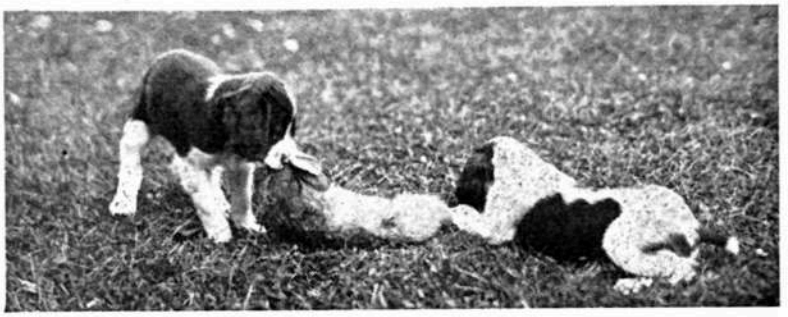
My good friend Mrs. Russell, who is the daughter of the late Richard Sharpe, told me that her father had a certain cure for hard mouth, and that she knew what it was. She would not give me the secret, however, and her father certainly never passed it on to me, so, whilst casting no doubts upon "Jean's" sincerity, I remain unconvinced.

The best cure for a hard mouth is to prevent it arising. If a dog is naturally inclined this way there is nothing you can do about it, but with the average well-bred gundog you can at least take every precaution against accidents and mishandling which might cause it to start biting game. Many men do not know how to detect whether a dog has bitten a bird, and you may sometimes see them blowing up the feathers to seek torn skin and flesh. The truly hard-mouthed dog hardly ever damages the skin (except perhaps for a small tooth puncture here and there), but it will *always* crush the ribs of the bird or animal. The experienced man feels the ribs of the retrieve with finger and thumb, and quickly detects any depressions or broken ribs which cannot be accounted for in any way other than through the fault of the dog. Torn skin may easily be due to the bird having been dragged from brambles or off a hedge, or through the dog picking it up *too* gingerly by the feathers.

Damaged Ribs

Damaged ribs can, of course, be caused by the shot or through the bird falling on to a tree or fencing post or something similar, and this is why at field trials the fair judge often gives a dog under suspicion the benefit of doubt and waits for it to have a "second bite," and, of course, no dog is put out for hard mouth unless it is the unanimous decision of all the judges that it is at fault. Experience quickly teaches you how a bird feels bitten and unbitten, and it is a good idea to make a regular habit of examining with thumb and forefinger the ribs of all birds retrieved, and aquainting yourself with the feel of birds about which there can be no possible doubt.

A dog may become hard-mouthed through nervousness, and I am quite convinced that dogs which are afraid of their handlers (and in particular those which have been thrashed for running-in after they have returned with a retrieve, about the silliest thing a handler can do) often "clench their teeth" in anticipation of punishment to come, and thereby damage their birds. I have known dogs, previously quite reliable as regards mouth, to start damaging game after having been spurred by a cock pheasant or bitten by a wounded squirrel or rat.



A bad start—two young springer pups "investigating" a dead rabbit.

Old and smelly birds or animals should never be given to pups as retrieves, and this can cause trouble, too, as can too early introduction to live and wounded game. Another cause of hard mouth can be interference by another dog whilst game is being picked up or returned to the handler.

Introduction to Pigeon

Pigeon are never the best type of birds to use when introducing a dog to the real thing, but for all that they are, through force of circumstances, about the most commonly used bird for this purpose. Dogs dislike their loose feathers which stick to tongue and mouth, and many dogs at first dislike the scent of pigeon. Where pigeon have to be used for early introduction to game, they should be cold and as feather-tight as possible, but certainly not so old as to be smelly, and they should be free from blood and not badly shot. Wounded woodpigeon should not be used as retrieves for inexperienced or excitable pupils until they are thoroughly accustomed to picking up dead ones.

Whatever certain keepers and other "natural training" fanatics may say, I believe that many cases of hard mouth are caused through failure to make good use of the dummy. I have known pups of three months or so to be started on retrieving straight away with pigeon, rooks, jays, rabbits and other "real" stuff, and in almost every case mouth trouble has arisen. A young puppy is naturally very playful and rough, and its milk teeth are sharp.

A thrown bird smells and feels attractive, the puppy tosses it up or plays with it, draws blood, bites . . . and the trouble commences. The first few retrieves of the inanimate dummy, which even if it is roughly treated does not taste like natural food, may produce worries, but at least they do not lay the foundation to permanent hardness of mouth.

Tugs-of-war between owner (or another dog) and pupil can give rise to mouth troubles. Nothing should ever be tugged from a puppy, or snatched if it can be avoided. Retrieves, or indeed anything that the dog may happen to be carrying (even if it should be one of your wife's best nylon stockings) should be taken from it gently and after the puppy has come right up to you. Do not chase or hit the puppy, but rather encourage it to deliver naturally, either by walking away or with some other artifice. Common sense (and thinking like a dog) must be the order of the day.

Food for Thought

I hope I have written enough to give the inexperienced man and woman some food for thought about retrieving and mouth. It is an interesting subject, and one about which you are always learning. Dogs vary tremendously, many never give a moment's worry about biting retrieves, others keep you on tenterhooks at all times. The most annoying dogs, in my opinion, are the occasional biters. I had a labrador last season which would retrieve nine birds out of ten perfectly, even strong runners. The tenth bird might be bitten so badly as to resemble a bloody sponge, almost every bone in the body broken and tooth punctures all over it.

This bitch was a very sensitive and highly-strung animal, and had been subjected to some pretty severe punishment before it came into my hands, and I believe this had a lot to do with it. With the dog which bites every head of game it retrieves you know where you are, and the best thing is to get rid of it. The occasional biter always seems worth persevering with, and trials have even been won by such dogs on their good days. However, I should not advise anybody to go to the expense and trouble of running a dog, however good it might be in other respects, if it remained unreliable as regards mouth. One or two bites during a trial would be sufficient to knock it out of the running completely, and the gamble that it *might* get through the stake without biting is just not worth taking.

The reader with the problem about delivery has a labrador which retrieves the dummy and handles perfectly ever since it returned from the professional who educated it. However, it has developed the habit of stopping a few feet away from the owner and dropping the retrieve (usually a crow or a pigeon), and even of playing about with the bird when it is first picked up. He makes the point that it behaved perfectly with the trainer, and with the first bird it picked up after he had it home, and that in every other respect he is more than satisfied with the bitch's performance.

This all may be due to youthful exuberance on the part of the bitch, and the all-to-common "playing-up" of a new handler. It may, of course, be due to some accident or incident which occurred without the owner's knowledge, or through the use of unsuitable retrieves (old, smelly birds for instance) or through another dog interfering whilst the pupil was picking up or returning or, quite possibly, through using the same bird for retrieving practice too many times. Ideally, no bird or other "real"

retrieve should be given more than once. Twice at the outside is the rule for one bird, otherwise the dog may get the idea that you do not want it, are throwing it away or even giving it to him to eat or play with.

I suggest that a case like this should be given a complete rest from retrieving anything for a week. It should then be tried with cold but fresh fur or feather, on a *long* retrieve from light cover, and that the handler whistles or calls the bitch urgently immediately its head goes down to pick up, and commences to walk or even run in the opposite direction, encouraging her to come dashing in by every means in his power. If success is achieved, the bitch should be praised and patted, and put away until later in the day, or even the next day. Do not let success spur you into giving retrieve after retrieve, especially with the same object.

If this fails, there are one or two alternatives which can be tried. Partial "force" retrieving practice can be carried out, the bird being placed in the dog's mouth and held there for a while. It should then be gently removed, the dog praised, and the procedure repeated. After this, the dog should be lead around carrying the bird, and every few yards the handler stops, removes the bird, replaces it, etc. There is also the old dodge of stopping the dog on the way in, ordering it to sit. If it will sit and hold the bird the handler moves forward and takes delivery gently, praises the dog, and thereafter tries to get the dog nearer and nearer before giving the command to sit.

Incidentally, there is one thing that seldom fails to improve the delivery of a reluctant retriever. This is the wounded bird—preferably a strong running cock pheasant, which if spat out promptly legs it into the nearest cover and causes the dog a long search all over again. I have had several dogs which never failed to deliver to hand after thus losing one or two birds, for the intelligent animal quickly realises that it is best to give it up to master quickly.

Springers Standing To Game

A Sussex reader has written to ask me if most springers of working strain show a natural tendency to stand their game, and how it can be fostered and encouraged as he likes the idea very much.

I should say that quite fifty per cent of the working - bred spaniels which have passed through my hands have exhibited a natural tendency to do this. The habit can be fostered and encouraged in the rabbit pen by using a lead or check cord and gently restraining the dog when it winds a squatting rabbit. I usually start my pupils off in a very small pen containing one rabbit, a tame and docile one which is accustomed to dogs and does not move very quickly. The pupil is worked on to the rabbit gently, and by manipulating the lead is restrained from making a dive for it. The handler must stand perfectly still, and there should be no distractions to divert the dog's attention. After a time the rabbit is made to move by the handler stepping forward, and at the same time the dog is given the command to drop and this is enforced with the lead.

Spaniels with a natural instinct for standing their game will quickly respond to this training, and though they do not all become reliable, the great majority do sooner or later acknowledge a high proportion of their game which sits tight. Of course there are always accidental flushes with spaniels—cases where they blunder into game without winding it, or where the bird or rabbit is too quick to flush. I have had spaniels which would point squatting birds or rabbits for so long that my patience ran out before theirs did. For true success, the dog should never be allowed to flush the game—this should always be done by the handler, who immediately insists upon the pupil dropping. However, it is possible to obtain quite a degree of reliability even where the dog is allowed to flush upon command, but here, too, it must be made to drop immediately it has done so.

FIELD TRIAL COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Field Trials Committee of the Kennel Club on May 10, the following recommendations from the Field Trial Council were considered :

- That the appointment of all championship stake judges shall be by ballot in which every society eligible to qualify for the championship shall participate.
- That the society responsible for organising the championship stake will select eight judges from the Kennel Club Field Trial panel of judges and circulate the list of eight names to all appropriate societies, who will be required to enumerate the eight judges in order of preference, thereafter returning the list to the organising society by a specified date.

The Field Trials Committee unanimously decided to refer both the above recommendations to the International Gundog League Retriever Society, with a recommendation that this method of selecting judges should be adopted, thus bringing the Retriever championship into line with the Spaniel championship.

The committee decided to add a further recommendation that the initial selection of judges should number ten instead of eight, as it had now been decided to have four judges for the Retriever championship.

- That a judge appointed to judge a particular championship stake shall be debarred from judging any qualifying trial in respect of and prior to that championship.

The Committee, however, decided that the recommendation could not be accepted, and they did not agree that the championship judges should be prevented from judging qualifying field trials for the whole of the season.

- That the Kennel Club be asked to send out a form to all Field Trial Societies on February 1 each year, asking the societies to state the names of any judges not on the present KENNEL CLUB OFFICIAL LIST who had judged at any of their trials during the previous year, and to state whether they can recommend them.

The committee agreed to accept this recommendation, but it was pointed out that many of the judges put forward by societies would probably have judged at one field trial only, whereas the Council had recommended in 1955 that no one should be added to the official panel who had not judged at least two field trials. The committee, therefore, decided to form a second or "B" Panel for each breed to which it would be possible to add the names of those who had judged one field trial only.

- That the Award of Honour be reinstated as a higher award than the Certificate of Merit, its withdrawal having caused great regret, as it was felt to be a most valuable means of indicating the distinction between dogs very little below the prize-winners and the dogs that reached the standard for a Certificate of Merit only.

The Committee decided that the Award of Honour should be reinstated for the reserve only in a stake, so that the judges would, at their discretion, award the reserve dog an Award of Honour or a Certificate of Merit.

FIELD TRIALS

The Yorkshire Gundog Club's field trials for pointers and setters were held on the Nookton and Newbiggin Moors, Blancheland, by kind permission of Captain W. Parlour, J.P. Grouse were plentiful and well grown. The All-Aged Stake was run on July 27 in fine bright weather, but poor scenting conditions. The faster dogs without exception out-ran their noses and flushed. The placed dogs all ran well and overcame the difficult conditions.

Results : 1, Mr. L. Humphrey's English setter bitch, Consist Wind 'Em ; 2, Mr. J. A. Rank's pointer dog, Scotney Gary ; 3, Captain W. Parlour's English setter bitch, Waygood Fiona. Reserve and C. of M., Captain W. Parlour's English setter bitch, Sharnberry Belle. C. of M., Captain W. Parlour's English setter dog Sharnberry Marksman, and Mr. L. Humphrey's English setter dog Dashing Cocky Bondhu.

July 28 was foggy and made conditions difficult in the morning for the Gordon Setter Stake. Three dogs overcame the conditions and worked well. One, unfortunately, misbehaved to shot.

Results : 1, The Misses Huntingtons' Riggside Rainbow ; 2, Mr. H. G. Ashman's Jarl of Westerdale.

The fog cleared soon after mid-day, and the Novice Stake was run in good scenting conditions. All the placed dogs ran well. The winner being outstanding in both rounds.

Results : 1, Colonel A. S. Balding's English setter bitch, Flashaway Eve 2, Mr. J. A. Rank's pointer dog, Scotney Cavalier ; 3, Captain W. Parlour's English setter bitch, Waywood Fiona. Reserve Mrs. F. Nagle's and Miss M. Clark's Irish setter bitch, Sulhamstead Nina.

The Society will be holding "bird-dog" trials on partridges at Wadworth, near Doncaster, on September 17 and 18, when the judges will be The Lady Auckland and Mr. John Forbes. Particulars from Mrs. E. Bailey, Long Close, Besscarr, Doncaster (telephone Doncaster 55402).

* * *

The next training class of the South Eastern Gundog Society will be held on August 19 at Boxhill, Surrey, by kind invitation of Brigadier Schreiber. Meet at Warren Farm 2.30 p.m. Teas will be provided. From Burford Bridge Hotel (on the Dorking-Leatherhead by-pass) take the Mickleham Road for one mile to second turning on right (signposted Headley). Proceed approximately two miles to Warren Farm on right. Look for S.E.G.S. direction signs *en route*.

Forthcoming Field Trials

SECRETARIES OF FIELD TRIAL SOCIETIES ARE INVITED TO SEND US REPORTS OF THEIR TRIALS FOR PUBLICATION IN "THE SHOOTING TIMES." REPORTS SHOULD BE SENT DIRECT TO THE KENNEL EDITOR, MR. P. R. A. MOXON, HERNE COMMON, HERNE BAY, KENT.

Aug. 22 : Labrador Club of Scotland (Amateur Handlers' Stake). Cromlix, Dunblane, Perthshire. Secretary : J. M. Manson, Glengour House, Ferryhills, Inverkeithing, Fife.

Sept. 10 & 11 : Yorkshire Gundog Club (Pointers and Setters). Secretary : Mrs. E. H. Bailey, Longclose, Bolton Hill, Bessacarr, Doncaster.

Sept. 10 & 11 : North Western Counties Field Trial Association (Spaniels). Penrith, Cumberland. Open Cocker and Open A.V. Stakes. Secretary, A. Mason, 21 King Street, Carnforth, Lancs.

Oct. 2 : Northumberland & Durham Labrador Retriever Club (Open Stake). Ford. Secretary, T. R. Hogg, School House, Ebchester, Consett.

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THE gunroom, especially the Northern gunroom, takes on a new lease of life at this time. Always a pleasing spot, it now blossoms into full bloom again. For all it contains has a direct interest and bearing, upon our near future activities. Even bottles of oil, cleaning rods, tow, etc.—those essential accessories of every firearm.

As to the cleaning of guns, this is a job I always do myself. It is a job which, for the most part, each man *has* to do—if he cleans his gun at all. But as a guest away from home the shooter may find himself in an establishment where it is the custom for the keeper or some attendant to do the gun cleaning. This can be a bit awkward. You see it is not everyone who cares to allow his best (and valuable) gun out of his sight—especially for gun cleaning. Guns may receive some pretty rough treatment at cleaning time and yet not be effectively cleaned. I have known a pair of best barrels to be bulged in the process—owing to the too generous and hearty use of a cleaning rod packed with tow. That is really a serious (and expensive) matter today. It is something which cannot be allowed. So at the risk of hurting somebody's feelings, I make myself forcibly clear on these occasions.

Cleaning Sets Past and Present

Cleaning implements are, in my opinion, better fashioned and generally more effective today. The former cleaning set always seemed to me to lack just the gadgets most needed. It would contain a Turks-head *steel* wire brush (an instrument of doubtful value and liable to scratch the fine surface of the bore), but never a bristle brush—probably the most useful brush of all. A bristle brush will not scratch, yet with the aid of oil it is stiff enough to remove most stubborn fouling. Isn't that just what is wanted? For very stubborn cases and more drastic action some kind of brass or bronze wire brush may be needed—this will not scratch the surface of the bore. I use (whenever the necessity arises—which is very seldom) what was known as the Payne-Gallwey brush. Here the wire is attached in circumferential bands and it does not wear out or get out of shape.

GUN GOSSIP

by North Country

My first gun etc., was supplied with none of these things. There was, in that case, just a two-piece cleaning rod, a brass jag and a mop. Also a bottle of *lock* oil. You cannot, no matter how conscientiously you work, keep a gun in proper order with such a paucity of tools. I could never see how the makers thought that you would. I may say that I lost no time in procuring the extra and necessary accessories. My gun meant everything to me—it had to be kept perfect from the start.

In the case of all those who are off to remote lodges in Scotland for grouse shooting, I would warn that it pays to take a full range of accessories. Shooting lodges and places of that kind are not so cut off today. All the same they may be most inconveniently placed for the procurement of supplies and a long way, even by present-day standards, from the nearest gun-shop. And if the weather behaves badly, a gun can get in a mess after a day on the moors. When I was shooting in Glenshee before the war we had torrents of rain for a whole week or more. Each afternoon we came back soaked and having changed we got down to the business of gun cleaning. It was a serious business which called for thorough application. For whether one shot or fifty had been fired from a gun, that gun needed very careful cleaning to ensure that the wet did not become established in the locks. My friend was using a gun with hand-detachable locks and had the advantage of me in this respect. But having all the odds and ends with us, we had nothing really to worry about.

Yet on that occasion our shot-sizes, for some reason, had not been selected with due care. We found ourselves "saddled" with a large quantity of No. 4s. There were other sizes as well, but how all those 4s came to be included in our supplies I do not know. No. 4 shot has its uses, but it is not a size that is entirely suitable on a grouse moor in August. Actually, as there were a number of blue hares on part of the shoot, we tried to keep them for this quarry. No. 4 from a cylinder barrel is not the best medicine for a grouse at 40 yards. The pattern is too thin.

On How to Sex a Bird

(Continued from page 542)

tions as to phylogeny and evolution, all problems into which much more research is needed. Such an instance was afforded the writer[5] in 1940 when a hybrid between the goldeneye and the smew was shot by Mr. T. C. Gregory on February 14, in East Kent. This bird, the first of its kind to have been obtained in the British Isles and the first to have been fully investigated, proved of exceptional interest, but much would have been lost had the endocrine and anatomical anomalies not been properly examined and reported on.

[5] Harrison, James M., 1943. "A Wild Cross between Glaucionetta clangula (L) and Mergus albellus (L). Some Endocrine and Anatomical Features." The Ibis, 85, pp. 253-257, 4 plates.

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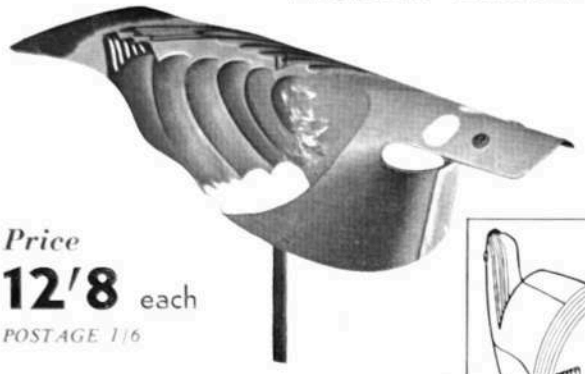

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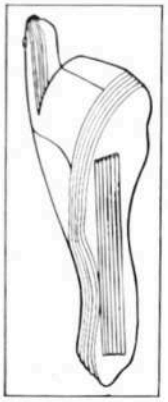

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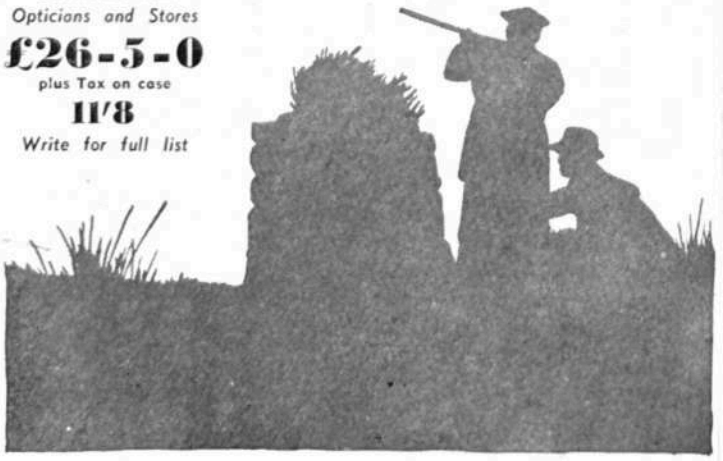

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